



Center for the Evangelical United Brethren Heritage

TELESCOPE-MESSENGER

United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio

Vol. 24 No. 1

Winter 2014

The Sages: First Missionary Journey

Compiled by Robert L. Frey

The first installment of this story of the Sages appeared in the Summer 2013 issue of the Telescope-Messenger. It chronicled the early life of Sanford Sage, his seminary preparation, his meeting and eventual marriage to Esther Balmer, and his decision to become a missionary. This installment picks up with their departure for Sierra Leone. Parenthetical page notations are from Mary Cay Wells' book, The Sages: 1880-1890 from which most of the material for this article was drawn.

Sanford and Esther Sage and their traveling companions¹ were in high spirits as the *Liberia* departed the New York harbor on October 6, 1883. But that did not last long. The *Liberia* was a rather small ocean-going vessel with only seven staterooms in addition to quarters for the captain and the crew of eight. Consequently, it was not a smooth-riding ship, particularly in the North Atlantic in early October. It was not long before all of the passengers, with the exception of a husband and wife who were Lutheran missionaries and had crossed the Atlantic nine times, were seasick. This malady followed the first-time travelers intermittently throughout the voyage.

It was a long voyage too. But Esther's journal indicates that during the times when they felt better, the voyage was a relaxing interlude before their work in Africa commenced. Time was spent reading, writing letters, and talking with the other passengers. It was not until November 19, 1883, 45 days after leaving New York, that the Sages and the other passengers disembarked at Freetown, Sierra Leone. Despite the bouts of illness, all arrived in relatively good health. They were met at the dock by Brother Joseph Gomer² who took them to a house where missionaries on their way to their stations stayed for a short time. During their stay in Freetown, Richard and Lida West, friends from seminary days, arrived to welcome Sanford and Esther.³

On November 23 Joseph Gomer, the Sages, and the Leshers departed on a rowboat loaded with freight for Shenge (Shangay). On arrival the next morning the party was greeted with a great deal of excitement. The arrival was an understandably emotional event for the Sages. They both record in their journals the enthusiastic reception they received, the beauty of the place, and their strong conviction that this was where the Lord wanted them to serve.

Shenge is located about 60 miles southeast of Freetown on the coast. The Sages were assigned to a room with a bath in the mission house as were the Leshers. They could look out on the ocean, and the waves breaking on the beach put them to sleep at night. The initial impression of the Shenge mission work recorded in the Sages' journals is positive. Both were impressed with the work that had been done, the buildings constructed, the farmland under cultivation, and the number of active churches. Sanford gave much of the credit for this success to Brother Gomer—and justifiably so as the historical record indicates.

The work of the mission was divided among the men. Because of his experience in Sierra Leone, Brother Gomer was the general superintendent or overseer; Rev. Leshar was in charge of the new mission steamer (which had not arrived at that point) that was to be used to transport the missionaries to the many little towns served by the Shenge mission; and Sanford was to manage the farm work, the store, and keep the books. They were to share in the teaching and preaching. Because of the wide area covered by the mission, Sanford had to be away from his home base frequently. On one such occasion, Esther traveled to Rotifunk, another mission station where the Wests were stationed, to visit with Lida.

But Esther had responsibilities at Shenge. A number of native children lived at the mission house, and it was the responsibility of Esther and Eleanor Leshar to educate these young women (boys stayed in another building). Cooking, sewing, housekeeping, as well as normal school subjects and Bible study had to be organized and delivered by the women. Sanford's journal indicates some surprise that on the first Sunday he was in Shenge he heard natives reading the Bible clearly. There are indications in his early journal entries that he might have

underestimated the natives in terms of their educational level and their ability to adjust to "western" farming methods. It is likely that he was not the first nor the last to do so.

But the early euphoria experienced by the Sages and the Leshers was soon tempered by the harsh realities of new conditions. Both the Sages and the Leshers suffered bouts of illness which they called "the fever." Mary Cay Carlson Wells, the author of the book *The Sages: 1880-1890* concludes that the fever was probably malaria which could often be fatal. At that time the cause of this disease was not known precisely and it was another 15 years before it was traced to mosquitoes. Sanford, as well as many others, felt the "malarial air" was the cause and, as a result, they considered mosquitoes to be no more than an annoyance. But they did have quinine and administered it to themselves, probably under the directions of Dr. West.

Communications back and forth between the Sages in Africa and their families in Ohio were spotty at best. Here, the Ohioans miscalculated. At first they assumed their letters were not getting to Sanford and Esther because Shenge had no postal service. In fact, Shenge did—as Sanford was the postmaster. But because of the slow movement of mail, the Ohio relatives did not realize that it could take up to three months, if not more, to receive an answer to any question. Thus, they assumed their letters had not gotten to the Sages. It was not until well into 1884 that expectations managed to meet reality.

Early in 1884 Mrs. Leshner gave birth to a little girl named Minnie who was a source of joy to everyone. But the Leshers were soon transferred to a new station (Avery), leaving Esther alone to superintend the work with the children. According to her journal, the mornings were usually given to scripture, singing, and prayer, followed by the study of academic subjects like spelling, rhetoric, geography, and mathematics. The afternoons were occupied with developing skills in sewing, cooking, and other practical skills. This was a demanding curriculum to teach—and to master!

As was often the case, the families of the Sages in Ohio tried to do more than write letters to Africa. They organized drives to raise money and put together shipments of clothing and food, which were received most gratefully by Sanford and Esther. On the reception of one of these shipments Sanford wrote: "I went to the steamer and helped unload cargo. . . A box of clothing came to me from Sandusky Conference. Some of the garments were made by my own dear mother and sisters. As I unfolded them and thought that these things came from home, I thanked God for giving me such

parents. May God abundantly bless the kind donors with life eternal." (pp. 163-164)

In November 1884 the Sages completed their first year of service in Sierra Leone. It was a year of heavy work mixed with intermittent illness for both Sanford and Esther as their journals indicate. It was clear that Sanford's years spent in working on an Ohio farm had put him in good stead for the work he experienced in the mission field. In one of his journal entries he indicated that he conducted 16 services in one week in addition to traversing difficult terrain and also doing farm work.

During the year tribal conflicts made life difficult for some of the missions. Rotifunk appeared to be affected more than Shenge. In mid-October Sanford and Esther were visiting in Rotifunk when the Yonni (a rival tribe) brought fighting close to Rotifunk. On one Sunday the fighting came close to town and a mission house in an outlying mission was burned. Wounded men were brought into Rotifunk where Dr. West and Sanford tended to them as best they could, considering the lack of adequate medications for such injuries. Some of the wounded did not survive, and the next day both the Sages and the Wests left Rotifunk to return to the safety of Shenge. In December, Lida West gave birth to a child in Shenge as it was too dangerous for her to return to Rotifunk. But the child did not survive and was buried beside another mission child who had died in infancy.

Certainly the Sages were seeing all sides of life on a mission field. It was amazing that they, and many other missionaries, were able to retain their optimism. But faith in God can do wonders as these people demonstrated throughout the years.

The year 1884 ended in concern for the financial stability of the Shenge mission. The meager funds for the work had to be cut in half and with the arrival of Dr. Flickinger, the Sages were told that they were to move to new work at Kooloong Station about 15 miles from Shenge. On January 19, 1885 they departed for their new assignment.

The arrival at Kooloong Station did not duplicate the emotional high of the initial arrival in Shenge. In fact, a depressing sight met Sanford and Esther when they surveyed Kooloong Station. Everything was rundown and showed little signs of even modest attention. The house where they were to stay was dirty and had never seen any paint. Furthermore, there was no good water source for the mission house. They would be the first white people to live in it. Sanford observed the scene and wrote, "May God give me wisdom and his spirit to direct me." (p. 177)

It did not take the Sages long to make the house not only livable, but quite comfortable. Kooloong

Station was also located on the coast and had more amiable breezes than did Shenge. The biggest problem, however, was finding a decent supply of water. With money in short supply, the initial request for money to dig a well was refused. After Sanford made a personal appeal to Dr. Flickinger,⁴ money was released and a well was dug. Supported by native men, Sanford did much of the work himself. Even after it was completed the water had to be filtered and usually boiled as well.

In addition to the mission house there was a school and a farm of 160 acres at Kooloong Station. But problems soon plagued Sanford. One of the teachers in the Kooloong school had to be disciplined and then dismissed, and several of the students had to be expelled as well. The particular behaviors that led to these actions were not specified in the journals but were obviously disheartening to the Sages.

An even bigger morale-breaker occurred when Dr. Flickinger accused Sanford of mishandling the financial records at Shenge.⁵ It was some time before Sanford was cleared in this matter and it was an extremely difficult period for him. Both he and Esther suffered illnesses during this time that included a serious test of their faith in their colleagues. After he was cleared, there was no indication of an apology from Dr. Flickinger. But Sanford and Esther quickly put this episode behind them because of the demanding work required of them at Kooloong Station.

Recurrent bouts of malaria affected Sanford, and life at Kooloong Station was not as staid as it was at Shenge. A series of thefts took place that resulted in the capture and punishment of several young men. Several times leopards encroached on the mission and threatened people. On at least two of these times, Sanford killed leopards with a rifle. Ants, lizards, snakes, and other wild animals were a more constant threat at Kooloong Station than they had been at Shenge.

The resident farmer was Mr. Herdy Bennett who with his wife were freed slaves from South Carolina. They had lived in Africa for about four years and had six children in the United States. By the time the Sages arrived in Kooloong Station, the Bennett's were quite homesick. So when a package of food came from Ohio, the Sages shared some of the precious gifts with the Bennetts. The mention of the Bennetts in Sanford's journal reminds one of the non-clergy men and women who went to Sierra Leone to help with the mission work. With the exception of Joseph Gomer, these people, who were not officially sent by the denomination, are not recognized adequately in the histories of the United Brethren Church and its mission work.

The farm at Kooloong Station yielded two crops of corn, cassava,⁶ sweet potatoes, and coffee during each season. Plenty of fish, fowl, and venison were available. The Sages preferred oranges and pineapples; however, mangoes, guava, bananas, okra, and eggplant were more readily available. The natives lived primarily on rice and cassava. Items such as flour, canned meats, and canned fruits had to be imported and were too expensive to consume in quantity. Nonetheless, adequate food was not a problem and Esther was able to report that "...we live well..." Although there was some truth to this, it was probably intended primarily to reassure family at home that all was well.

In addition to the Sages, the mission house accommodated the six girls who attended the mission school; the 21 boys lived with the Bennetts in another house on the grounds. But the Sages, the Bennetts, the boys, and the girls all usually ate together, and they lived "as a family" Esther reported. Frequently other families visited the mission asking the Sages to accept their sons or daughters into the mission school. Since there was no room for all who requested, many had to be turned away.

The stove in the mission house did not work properly and it was some time before a new one could be procured. At some point Esther got a sewing machine and took great delight in showing the astonished girls how it worked. Esther was responsible not only for teaching them academic subjects, but as in Shenge, also taught them basic homemaking and housekeeping skills. Her journals show that she clearly enjoyed this relationship with the young ladies.

But the good times did not last long. In the summer of 1885 both Esther and Sanford suffered increasing bouts of illness. Each lost weight and went to Freetown for rest and medical treatment. This did relatively little good and they returned to Shenge to

Telescope-Messenger

Is published twice yearly by the Center
For the Evangelical United Brethren Heritage
United Theological Seminary
4501 Denlinger Road
Trotwood, OH 45426

Editor: Robert L. Frey
Compositor: Patricia Frey
Printer: Mound Printing Co. Inc.

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recuperate. But the illnesses dragged on. In June the Leshers, also weakened by illnesses, returned to America. For the remainder of the summer Sanford and Esther traveled to Kooloong Station for short stretches of time and then returned to Shenge as they were not able to shake their illnesses. Finally, Joseph Gomer decided they had to leave Kooloong Station and amidst much sadness they left on September 1.

On September 4, their second wedding anniversary, Esther's journal entries show no signs of illness. Esther writes:

I think we can truly say we have been a blessing to one another and I trust also to many of this dark land. . . We are neither homesick nor lonesome and take great pleasure in our work here . . . truly these have been two years of happy married life. (p. 191)

But only a few days later Sanford became extremely ill with a fear that he might die at any time. In the company of another couple, the Sages returned to Freetown and an appointment with a new doctor. He recommended that the Sages return to America immediately. They were not able to arrange this trip until November 6, 1885, when again amidst much sadness, they departed for England. One month later they arrived in Ohio. A note in the *Religious Telescope* of December 23, 1885, announced the return of the Sages to Ohio with the comment, "These devoted missionaries have done a good work in Africa, and deserve the confidence, sympathy, and prayers of our people." (p. 193) So ended the first missionary journey of Sanford and Esther Sage.

1. Rev. and Mrs. James M. Leshers, who joined the Sages at Harrisburg on their journey to New York, were also aboard the ship. A brief biography of the Leshers follows this article.

The Reverend James M. Leshers

By Robert L. Frey

The Sages mention little about the background of Rev. and Mrs. James Leshers who accompanied them to Sierra Leone. This always sparks the interest of an historian. With the excellent research help of Harry Burchell, the interim archivist of the EUB Center at United Theological Seminary, the following brief biography has been compiled.

James M. Leshers was born in Freeburg, Snyder County, Pennsylvania (several miles south of Selinsgrove), on September 23, 1857. It is not clear what the religious atmosphere of his home was, but at an early age he accepted Christ as his Savior and joined the Freeburg United Brethren Church. Upon completion of high school in Freeburg, James Leshers entered Lebanon Valley College at Annville, Pennsylvania.

2. Joseph Gomer and his wife Mary were free African-Americans. After serving in the Civil War on the side of the North, Joseph moved to Dayton, Ohio, where he practiced carpentry. He and his wife were members of Third United Brethren Church. When hearing of the mission in Sierra Leone, he offered their services as missionaries. Initially they were rejected because Joseph was not a clergyman, but they were eventually accepted and were probably the saviors of the mission in Sierra Leone.

3. Rev. Dr. Richard N. West had been Sanford's roommate in seminary for the first two years. Although he left the seminary a year before Sanford and Esther, they were all good friends and Richard West had played a major role in Sanford's decision to become a missionary. Lida West was a long-time friend of Esther's and her seminary roommate as well. Since the last story on the Sage's I discovered that according to Dr. Lowell Gess's book, *My Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, (p. 145) West was a medical doctor (he was probably one by apprenticeship rather than via an M.D. degree because Gess does not list him as possessing an M.D. degree). Gess says of West: "Dr. West depended very much on prayer in the undertaking of difficult situations and challenging patients, telling them that unless God blessed the work he [Richard] would fail. He had few instruments and little medicine with which to work." It appears that Dr. West was the first UB medical missionary to Sierra Leone.

4. In 1884 and 1885 Dr. Flickinger came under severe criticism by the Board of Missions because of financial shortfalls in the mission work. This led him to reduce the denomination's financial support to the Sierra Leone work as can be understood. Nonetheless, it did lead to a recognition that more attention needed to be paid to this work. Indirectly this led to the creation of a bishop's position for foreign missions and Dr. Flickinger was elected to this position.

5. Mary Cay Wells speculates that the Sages were "banished" to Kooloong Station because of this accusation. It is not clear what the nature of the accusation might have been, but it must have had no foundation because of Sanford's comment that no apology [for a false accusation] was ever received from Dr. Flickinger.

6. Cassava is a long tuberous starchy root about two inches around and eight inches long. The root has a brown fibrous skin and snowy white interior flesh. If prepared properly it can give significant carbohydrate and protein to the diet. Originally South American in origin, it was imported into Africa by the Spanish.

In 1878 James Leshers completed what appears to have been a bachelor's degree at LVC. After graduation he felt called to the ministry and joined the East German Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (UB). During his first pastorate at Middletown, PA, he met Eleanor Parks to whom he was married on September 16, 1880. Unfortunately, at this point we know little about her. In addition to Middletown between 1878 and 1883 Leshers also served pastorates in Susquehanna and Tamaqua. He was ordained in October, 1882, at the

annual conference held in Pine Grove, PA, by Bishop John A. Dickson.

Within the year after his ordination, however, Leshner expressed a desire to be a missionary. One must assume that his wife was not entirely opposed to this direction—perhaps she was an instigator in the decision.¹ He was appointed to Sierra Leone by the Foreign Missionary Board of the UB denomination. It is at this point where the Leshners come in contact with the Sages when the former boarded the same New York-bound train in Harrisburg.

As mentioned in the Sages' story, the Leshners were compelled to return to the United States after about two years in Sierra Leone, primarily because of the illness of Eleanor and their infant daughter Minnie who had been born at Shenge. In a parallel to the Sage's experience, James Leshner spent the next year visiting conferences and churches in the denomination to encourage the support of the Sierra Leone mission.

James Leshner returned to Sierra Leone on September 18, 1886, without his wife and child. Could this indicate that James was more interested in missionary service than his wife? Or did he not want to expose his wife and child to the health risks of Sierra Leone? Since the Leshners eventually had at least two more daughters and two sons, it is likely that one of these was "on the way" or already born, and it would have been risky to take his wife and child or children with him on his return to Sierra Leone.

Leshner spent the next year in Sierra Leone during which time he superintended the construction of the Rufus Training School at Freetown. Interestingly, the sandstone used in its construction came from the slave pens used by the slave trader John Newton, the hymn writer of "Amazing Grace" among other hymns. On May 1, 1887, Leshner returned to the United States and did not return to Sierra Leone thereafter. It is not clear if his return was instigated by health problems.

On Leshner's return to the United States he received and accepted a call from the First UB Church in Wilkesburg, PA. After two years he accepted a call from the First Church at Greensburg, PA.² While serving this church he was instrumental in the founding of a new congregation at Pitcairn. Shortly thereafter he became pastor of the Pitcairn Church during which time he initiated work that resulted in the East Pittsburgh church and McKeesport First Church. Before his retirement he served Braddock Second Church, East Pittsburgh, McKeesport Fawcett Avenue, Conemaugh, and Somerset—all United Brethren churches.

Because of ill-health (perhaps the result of illnesses he suffered in Africa) Rev. Leshner was forced to retire from the active pastorate in 1901 at the relatively young age of 44. He then entered the retail lumber business until his sudden and unexpected death on July 24, 1924, from a heart attack. His death occurred after lunch and a few hours after his daughter Minnie and her husband Edgar of Columbus, Ohio, had arrived for a visit. Rev. Leshner's funeral service was held at First UB Church in Pitcairn where he had lived since retirement.³ Burial took place in Woodlawn Cemetery, Wilkesburg, beside his wife who had died on September 7, 1922.

At the time of his death three daughters and two sons survived, indicating that others might have died before this time.

Such is the rather sterile outline of the life of James Leshner. But it does not tell us much about his "essence" or his character. Unlike the Sages' who left a legacy of journals and letters, at this point we do not have such from Rev. Leshner. It is safe to say that he was a totally committed Christian who was willing to lay his life on the line, as so many missionaries did, to spread the gospel. On his return to the United States his evangelistic efforts led to the initiation of at least three new churches by the age of 44. Others might have resulted had his health not forced him to retire. An impressive record to say the least!

1. Women were particularly active in the early missionary movements. Before the arrival of the Sages and the Leshners the following women had already served or were serving in Africa: Emily Beeken (1876-1878), Mrs. J. K. Billheimer (1861-1864), Lissie Bowman (1876-1877), Mrs. J.A. Evans (1875-1899), Mrs. Mary Gomer (1870-1894), A. Mahala Hadley (1866-1869), Mary Mair (1879-1883), Mrs. Peter Warner ((1873-1875), and Mrs. R.N. West (1882-1894). Those designated "Mrs." served with their husbands but were usually appointed to mission work with their husbands.

2. The use of the term "accepted a call" is interesting. Was he not appointed by the bishop? The term "accepted a call" would not likely have been used in the conference proceedings of the Evangelical Association and therein marks a difference between the polity of the two denominations that was to cause problems during the years before 1946 (and even at that time) when merger attempts were made between the two denominations.

3. Rev. Ernest G. Sawyer, a close friend of the Leshners for many years, conducted the funeral service and wrote the obituary of James for the Conference Record. Sawyer's theme for the sermon was "He was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost."

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Religious Telescope, September 6, 1924 (Volume 90, No. 36), 16. There are some discrepancies between the 1924 Conference Proceedings and this obituary regarding the charges Rev. Leshner served. Short of additional research in earlier Conference records it is not possible to reconcile these, but they are not of that much importance in this brief biography.

Bishop Walden Maynard Sparks

The brief biographical paragraphs, compiled by the editor, came from Paul W. Milhouse's Nineteen Bishops of the Evangelical United Brethren Church (Nashville, TN., Parthenon Press) 1974, pp. 101-106.

Born in Rockwood, Pennsylvania (several miles south of Somerset), on December 16, 1906, Bishop Sparks grew up in the home of a United Brethren pastor and his wife. At the age of 12 he preached his first sermon during an evangelistic service in the church where his father was then a pastor. He was licensed about the time he entered Lebanon Valley College, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree. He then completed his Bachelor of Divinity degree from Bonebrake (now United Theological Seminary) in Dayton, Ohio, and was ordained an elder by Bishop Grant Batdorf in 1930. About a year later he married Blanche May Frank.

Bishop Sparks and his wife served a number of churches in Pennsylvania for 16 years before he was elected conference superintendent at about the time of the merger of the United Brethren into the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1946. Four years later he was appointed assistant professor and later chaplain at Lebanon Valley College. It was from this position that the General Conference of 1958 elected him bishop. He was assigned to the western part of the church with his residence in Sacramento, California.

As events led to the eventual merger between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the EUB denomination, Bishop Sparks was caught in the middle of a challenging disagreement within primarily the Oregon and Washington conferences of the EUB. Eventually this led to the creation of the Evangelical Church of North America. A recent series of articles in the *Telescope-Messenger* tended to view this "split" in relatively sterile terms. While it is frequently good to forget the past, it must be acknowledged that events surrounding these disagreements were personal and hurtful to many people, including Bishop Sparks. One suspects that it was not without some relief that he retired in 1972.

His wife's death preceded his, but Bishop Sparks died on August 17, 1999, in his home in Sacramento.

Following are several unedited tributes to Bishop Sparks that resulted from the previously mentioned articles on the Evangelical Church of North America. They were gathered and submitted by Janet L. Smith of Des Moines, Washington. They speak primarily to the personal qualities of the bishop and less to his formal episcopal duties. The first entry comes from recently deceased Bishop Jack Tuell.

Bishop Maynard Sparks came to our Pacific Northwest Annual Conference at the time of union, 1968. I served under his appointment the next four years. Then in 1972 I was elected bishop and joined him on the Council of Bishops, as he entered the retired relation.

But the things I most remember about him came in the early 1990s, after his wife, Blanche, had died, and he was living alone in his modest home in Sacramento, California.

He had been inviting us to "stop by on our way through" and see him and so my wife, Marji, and I did just that—we were all delighted to see one another, and he insisted we stay overnight with him, which we did.

Our conversations covered a wide range of subjects, but there are two things we learned which stick in my mind because they were so typical of this dear friend. One was his Sunday morning routine. He would arise early and walk to the early morning Mass at a nearby Catholic Church. He quickly became known and loved by the priest and the congregation, who received him as a brother in Christ. Then he would go home and drive to his "home Church," Faith UMC, a church that had once been a part of his episcopal area during EUB days.

The second thing he told us was that (weather permitting) he would go for a walk around his block daily, "... singing the songs of Zion" and praying for each household as he walked by.

These two stories illustrate something of the essence of the man—a genuine ecumenical spirit which reached out to all followers of Christ, and a deep joy in his faith which he expressed by "singing the songs of Zion" and lifting prayers on behalf of households of many faiths and of no faith.

Maynard Sparks—a remarkable combination of qualities in a true and faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

Bishop Jack M. Tuell

I look back with such joy to the years Bishop Sparks guided the Annual Conference and especially the Conference Office where I served on the staff. We were all amazed at the quiet competence with which so many details were handled. But years later I came to even a greater level of appreciation when Maynard remembered our wedding anniversary each year with a beautiful handwritten note and mentioned our four daughters by name.

The highlight of my respect came when Wilma and I stopped in Sacramento and walked with him around the blocks that he and his wife had circled together each day. We found that after her death, he wrote her a daily letter telling about what he had seen on his walk that day—new flowers in bloom, a yapping puppy that had often greeted them, and a visualization of any other scene that they had previously shared together. It signaled to us the never ending bond of love between them.

The Reverend Johnson

Bishop Sparks was the Bishop of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the UMC when I went to work as a secretary in the Conference's Council of Ministries Office. We were on the same floor as the Bishop's office so we all had coffee together.

Bishop Sparks was such a very gentle person and he had a very lovely wife, named Blanche, I believe. We always had a big Christmas party for the entire offices—Council on Ministries, District Offices, Treasurer's Office, and Bishop's Office. So we had a chance to see the very human side of the Bishop and his wife.

During the time I was working there my mother died in Portland where they lived. Bishop Sparks wrote me the most beautiful letter at that time, which I really treasured. He was known as the Man of Letters. He wrote handwritten letters to many people on many occasions.

Many years later, after Bishop Sparks retired and was living in Sacramento, he came to Seattle for the Council of Bishops meeting. I believe they were at the Sheridan Hotel in downtown Seattle, and our offices were about five or six blocks from there. One day Bishop Sparks walked over to our office and visited with a number of us at lunch time in our lunchroom. It was so nice to visit with him and he told of some of his activities in Sacramento.

Doris J. Smith, Secretary Retired

When Maynard Sparks came to the Pacific Northwest he faced a divided and somewhat hostile EUB Conference. The leadership of the conference was suspicious of and threatened by the General Church. They had moved to a more rigid and conservative theological position, established a seminary, a printing press, and adopted the Oriental Missionary society as an expression of mission activity. I grew up in the First Evangelical Church of Seattle, a congregation that was in strong support of the denominational programs and theological stance.

After completing my work at Seattle Pacific College, I decided to attend two years of Seminary at

Western Evangelical in Portland, Oregon, and then complete my work at Evangelical Theological Seminary in Naperville, Illinois. After one year at Naperville, we returned to the Northwest to a staff position in an EUB church in Spokane, Washington. At the end of that year I was offered a position as pastor at an EUB church in Oregon, where I could then attend Western Evangelical Seminary and complete my graduate work.

Methodist merger conversation came before us. I was in support of it. The majority of leadership in the conference opposed it. Merger was also strongly opposed by the administration of Western Evangelical Seminary. I was a ministerial student and needed a two-thirds vote by my colleagues to maintain my status. Eighteen votes against me ended my career as a minister in the EUB.

Enter Maynard Sparks. The Bishop was very supportive of my wife, Llewellyn, and me. He offered us an appointment in Denver. I told him "that I had received an offer to be an associate pastor in a large Methodist church in Seattle, where I could begin the process toward ordination in the Methodist Church." Bishop Sparks said to me, "You go into the Methodist Church, you will have more room to spread your wings."

I share my journey in gratitude and appreciation for a genuine, caring, Christian gentleman, who graciously opened new doors of ministry for my family and me. After moving through the UM process toward ordination and completing seminary work at the Claremont (CA) School of Theology, Bishop Sparks, now a Bishop in the UMC, laid hands on me and ordained me an elder in the UMC.

The Rev. David L. Ernst

During one of the sessions of our Annual Conference of the former EUB years (about 1964), Bishop Sparks said he could not begin the session of the Conference until the large, comfortable chair provided for him was removed. He said he needed only a folding chair to sit on—just like the rest of us.

During this same conference Bishop Sparks noticed that Rev. Ralph W. Wilde and his wife Barbara were sitting in the audience. Rev. Wilde was shivering from the unusually cool mid-June day. Bishop Sparks went to his car and came back with his warm (long) winter coat. He gave the coat to Rev. Wilde and told him to keep it. (You see, the Wilde's had just returned from their final missionary years of service with the EUB in Brazil where it was much warmer). During the summer of 1968 while I was working as a volunteer under the former EUB Home Mission Board at Red Bird Mission in Kentucky and in the Health Care Center of Otterbein Home in Lebanon, Ohio—I was invited by the Bishop to call him anytime and share my joys and needs at hand.

Bishop Sparks was a gift to our former EUB and to the UMC. He kept a close eye on his ministers and offered his listening ear when needed. My brother E.V. Smith was one of those ministers.

Janet L. Smith

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From the Editor

An outdated mailing list was inadvertently used in mailing the last issue of the *Telescope-Messenger*. As a result, many of you might not have received the last issue. While I attempted to identify individuals who did not get it, I am certain that I was not able to recover the entire list. If you did not get the issue containing the first installment of the story of the Sages (Volume 23, Number 2—Summer 2013), you can get it on the Center for the EUB Heritage website:

<http://united.edu/images/stories/documents/PDF/TN/tm-23-2.pdf>

If you do not have access to the internet, let me know. I have some extra copies and will send them until I run out. We are sorry for this problem and have taken steps to make certain it does not happen again.

Robert L. Frey